

FAA Background Information Regarding U.S. Civil Aviation – Mali

During 2020, extremists/militants increased their attacks in Mali in an effort to exploit the fragile security situation and political instability in the country. Given these circumstances, the FAA assesses there is continuing risk to U.S. civil aviation flying into, out of, within, or over the territory and airspace of Mali at altitudes below Flight Level (FL) 260. As a result, on 26 February 2021, the FAA published Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) KICZ A0003/21, advising U.S. civil aviation to exercise caution when flying into, out of, within, or over the territory and airspace of Mali at altitudes below FL260.

Civil aircraft transiting Mali's airspace at altitudes below FL260 and aircraft operating to and from Malian airports, particularly where international forces are collocated, are at risk from a variety of weapons, including small arms; indirect fire weapons, such as mortars and rockets; and anti-aircraft-capable weapons, including man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS). Such weapons could target aircraft operating at low altitudes, including during the arrival and departure phases of flight, and/or airports and aircraft on the ground. Some extremist/militant groups active in Mali are suspected of possessing, or having access to, MANPADS capable of reaching a maximum altitude of 25,000 feet.

During 2020, extremists/militants increased their attacks on Malian military forces and international peacekeepers, conducting multiple attacks using small arms and indirect fire weapons, such as mortars and rockets. Extremists/militants reportedly captured additional weapons, including heavy machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), and rocket launchers during some of these attacks. On 30 November 2020, militants conducted coordinated attacks against three military bases in Mali. Although no troops were injured or killed, the attacks displayed improved coordination among Mali-based extremists/militants. On 14 June 2019, Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) militants fired on a French military helicopter, forcing the aircraft to make a 'hard' landing. In April 2018, extremists/militants attacked UN peacekeepers at two bases near Timbuktu Airport (GATB) using both indirect fire weapons and vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED). Additionally, in mid-January 2017 and late-November 2016, extremists/militants conducted VBIED attacks against, or in close proximity to, Gao Airport (GAGO) and rocket attacks against Timbuktu Airport (GATB).

Southern Mali has been subjected to lower levels of violence. However, terrorism targeting U.S. or Western interests has occasionally occurred in the capital, Bamako. In November 2015, transnational terrorists affiliated with al-Qa'ida attacked the Radisson hotel in Bamako, resulting in the deaths of 20 people, including six crew members of a non-U.S. operator.

Due to continued concerns over the risk to U.S. civil aviation in Mali, U.S. operators and airmen are advised to exercise caution when flying into, out of, within, or over the territory and airspace of Mali at altitudes below FL260.

Posted: 26 FEB 2021